

# EMPLOYER TIPS

From the *Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance & Prevention Project*, MA Dept. of Public Health

## Keeping Young Workers Safe on the Job


For many teens, work is a rewarding experience. However, it also has risks. Each year more than 160,000 US teens are injured at work, about a third of whom are hurt badly enough to seek emergency room treatment. This tip sheet provides some simple guidelines employers can follow to prevent injuries to teen workers.

### 7 Steps to Safer Teen Jobs

#### ① Know & Post the Child Labor Laws

The child labor laws prohibit teens from working late or long hours and from performing certain hazardous tasks.

**You should post the child labor laws in a prominent place where all employees can see them.**

A downloadable poster of the child labor laws can be found on the website of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Teens at Work Program:  
 [www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork](http://www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork).

**Remember,** health and safety regulations that apply to your business cover all employees, regardless of age.

#### ② Make Sure Teens Have Work Permits

Before beginning a new job, **every teen less than 18 years of age must get a Work Permit** from the school district where he or she lives or attends school.

- ◆ Employers must keep issued permits on-site until the teen leaves the job, at which time the permit is sent back to the school department that issued it.
- ◆ Permits are required for all teens under 18 even if they are no longer attending school.

#### ③ Identify & Eliminate Hazards

- ◆ Review where injuries have occurred in the past.
- ◆ **Eliminate hazards whenever possible.** This can often be accomplished through the redesign of work areas, tasks, or equipment, and does not have to require expensive technology.
- ◆ Depending on the type of job, personal protective equipment such as goggles, safety shoes, and gloves can protect against injuries and may even be required by law.



**Make appropriate protective equipment accessible and train teens on how to use it properly!**

Making an extra effort to eliminate hazards, providing supervision and ongoing training, and involving employees in a prevention program can go a long way toward reducing injuries and illnesses, building morale, and lowering your workers' compensation costs.

#### ④ Provide Effective Supervision

**Make sure front-line supervisors who give work assignments know the child labor laws!**

- ◆ Supervisors and older employees should set good examples by following safety rules.
- ◆ Supervisors should observe teens at work to see that they are doing tasks as trained.
- ◆ Teens may be reluctant to let others know when they don't understand something so it is important to create an atmosphere that encourages speaking up when a problem arises or if instructions are unclear.

#### ⑤ Provide Health & Safety Training

**Work with teens to identify hazards and train them on how to do tasks safely.** For example:

- ◆ Review steps for proper lifting and correct use of tools and equipment.
- ◆ Explain what tasks they are not allowed to do according to the child labor laws.
- ◆ Discuss what to do in the case of a spill or other problem.
- ◆ Give them clear instructions for each task, especially new and unfamiliar ones.

Interviews with injured teens reveal that teens are often injured when they are trying to do more than they have been trained to do.



#### ⑥ Prepare Teens for Emergencies

**Employees of all ages should be ready to handle different types of emergencies at work.**

- ◆ Show your young employees escape routes and explain what to do in the event of a fire, a potentially violent situation, or other emergency.
- ◆ Teens also need to know what to do and where to go if an injury should occur. This is information that should be written and accessible to all employees.

#### ⑦ Establish a Health & Safety Committee

Set up a health and safety committee that meets regularly to identify hazards and address problems.

- ◆ Employees know their jobs and workplaces well and often have insightful ideas about injury prevention.

**Include employees of all ages and all levels of management in your committee.**

## Ideas From Other Employers

**Here are examples of safety practices that are successfully being used by employers of teens across the country:**

♦ Different-colored smocks are issued to employees under age 18 at a chain of convenience stores so supervisors know who is not allowed to operate the power-driven meat slicer.

♦ A California zoo assigns each new teen worker a “buddy” or mentor who answers questions, helps give hands-on training, and offers safety tips.

♦ Some employers place bright red warning stickers on equipment that teens may not legally operate or clean (stickers are available from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Wage & Hour Division while supplies last).

♦ A fast-food employer developed a computerized scheduling program to ensure that teens under age 16 aren’t scheduled for too many hours during school weeks.

♦ At their monthly safety meetings, a retail clothing chain with many young employees has workers act out specific health and safety problems and then come up with solutions.

♦ One employer, with 31 pizza restaurants in Virginia, took the unusual step of posting signs offering a \$100 reward to workers under 18 who report that they had been asked to perform hazardous jobs.

## Labor Law Compliance Checklist

This checklist can help you determine if you are in compliance with some of the most important labor laws governing the employment of minors in Massachusetts. The list is not complete and is *not intended as legal advice*.

If you have questions regarding the items on this checklist please contact the relevant agencies listed below.

- ☐ Employees under 18 *do not* work too many hours, too late, or too early, according to the child labor laws.
- ☐ Employees under 18 *do not* do any of the tasks prohibited for their specific age group.
- ☐ Employees under 18 *do not* work after 8 pm without direct supervision by an adult who is in the workplace and who is reasonably accessible.
- ☐ All employees under 18 have valid Work Permits.
- ☐ All employees are covered by workers’ compensation.
- ☐ Employees receive at least the minimum wage or an approved sub-minimum wage approved by the Division of Occupational Safety.

## Employer Resources

### Workplace Health & Safety:

#### Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

Methuen Office - (617) 565-8110  
Braintree Office - (617) 565-6924  
Springfield Office - (413) 785-0123  
[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

#### MA Division of Occupational Safety

On-site Consultation Program  
(offers free consultation services to help employers improve their safety and health programs and train employees)  
(617) 969-7177  
[www.mass.gov/dos/consult](http://www.mass.gov/dos/consult)

#### MA Department of Public Health

Teens at Work Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project  
(617) 624-5632  
[www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork](http://www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork)

### Wages & the Child Labor Laws:

#### MA Office of the Attorney General

Fair Labor Division  
(617) 727-3465  
[www.mass.gov/ago](http://www.mass.gov/ago)

#### US Department of Labor

Wage and Hour Division  
(617) 624-6700  
[www.dol.gov/esa/whd](http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd)



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